

August, 1950

BRIEF OUTLINE FOR
COUNTY EXTENSION PUBLIC RELATIONS*

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You and I are the proud heirs to a noble tradition of public service. It is our privilege and our opportunity to keep perfecting and widening this service. Good public-relations techniques will help us to do so.

What Kind of Public Relations Techniques?

Surely, the best possible kind. That's the kind that rural people and the Extension program deserve. Like death and taxes, you'll always have some kind of public relations with you. Your decision is whether they are to be good, medium or poor.

If you want them to be good, you'll need a definite plan of action to keep them that way. It's work, of course. But the results in terms of Extension accomplishment and of good will more than compensate for the extra effort.

You'll want your public relations to be good, of course. So let's see what would be involved in making and keeping them good. First, a few general definitions . . .

Public Relations = What You Do + Your Due

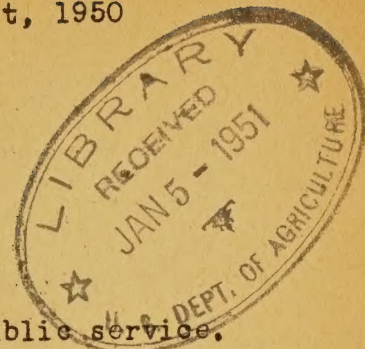
That's it, what you do in giving dependable service to the public in an organized way . . . plus your due in getting the credit for your services.

Public relations means the application of the Golden Rule . . . working with and for others in the manner that you would like them to work with and for you, if they had the same opportunity.

"Extension public relations is doing good work in a way which develops in the public mind an appreciation for and recognition of the program." -- Definition by the Public Relations Subcommittee of the Committee on Extension Organization and Policy.

Public relations is what shapes public opinion. Public opinion is the mirror of the public mind . . . a mirror

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in which should be reflected your deep confidence in what you are doing and the sincerity, enthusiasm, and effectiveness with which you are doing it.

These definitions will give you the general idea, although, actually public relations is better demonstrated by deeds than defined in words. There is nothing mysterious about the term, "public relations." It's just professional jargon for something as old as human life.

Boiled down to its essence, Extension public relations are contacts . . . the right kind of contacts . . . courteously conducted, constructive contacts with people . . . public contacts made in developing the program, in giving essential services, and in explaining what you are doing. Not "publicity" in the sense of organizational puffery or propaganda, not glamorized information, but public relations grounded upon factual information and helpful services to people.

What's That Again

Before we go any farther I suppose we might as well illustrate these general definitions by citing some specific examples. Here are a few. . . .

Inviting a committee of representative county groups to help plan the Extension program. That's the public relations of democratic participation in program planning.

Presenting an illustrated verbal or written report of progress to the elected representatives who contribute to your budget (county officials, to be sure; also State and national legislative representatives who reside in your county).

Reporting to the general public by way of the press, radio, and other ways of diffusing reports to many people.

Smilingly performing a requested service when you are fagged from a late meeting last night and feel like biting nails. Remember that a person is judged by the last impression he leaves.

Writing a sincerely generous reply to an unjustly critical letter, when you would really like to tell the writer off. If the criticism is just, frankly acknowledge it and make the required adjustment.

Investing your telephone voice with warm, friendly courtesy when the jangle of the 'phone rudely interrupts you in the midst of harrassed efforts to meet an important dead line.

Keeping a promise in spite of brimstone and high water.

Through contagious casual conversation, infusing influential key people with an enthusiastic regard for Extension philosophy and for the accomplishments of rural people who have adopted better Extension recommended practices.

Making it easy for people to find you by erecting suitable directional signs, by having your office in a convenient location, and by arranging for the proper listings in the telephone book.

Training your secretary to meet people with a spirit of courteous efficiency.

These examples don't reflect all Extension public relations . . . not by a jug full. But let's get back on the main line.

Scope of Public Relations

Everything that Extension does has public relations implications . . . typing a neat letter as well as conducting a broad public-interest program. Public relations has no frontier. You're in it up to your neck. No organization can long succeed unless public-relations principles are applied to all its functions.

Why Should You Plan for Good Public Relations?

First and foremost, to carry on your operating job efficiently. That's about 90 percent of good public relations.

Second, to inform people through public reporting how well your operating job is being done. That's about 10 percent of good public relations. Much public recognition outside your area of direct contacts stems from this 10 percent.

Won't Public Recognition Come Naturally From the Doing

It will from the cooperators with whom you have direct contacts, and from those with whom these cooperators talk. But you'll need to inform the others.

Every tax-supported organization is under keen scrutiny by the public and by its legislative representatives, to determine the value of the organization in the public interest. The international situation may make it necessary for Government to diminish important civilian program expenditures in favor of emergency military expenditures.

Here is an index of public alertness that constitutes a challenge to reporting complacency:

In 1939 . . . 7,700,000 persons filed income-tax returns.

In 1949 . . . the number increased almost sevenfold to 52,200,000.

You are on the people's payroll. The public has a cash investment in you. Accordingly, it is entitled to know whether its investment is expended wisely. You therefore have an obligation to report to the public and its legislative representatives frequently throughout the year. Besides that, it's good business.

It is well to remember that good reporting also influences others to seek further information about the practices being reported. Consequently, good reporting cannot be divorced from the operating job.

Some Qualities Needed for Good Public Relations

It takes more than people to make an organization that lives; more than an administrative program; more than a problem to be met.

It takes also a deep-seated, enthusiastic belief in the justice of your cause. Intent is as important as content.

It takes a knowledge of Extension principles, of its philosophy, its policies and objectives.

It takes an understanding of how to speak or write or do things in terms of public needs, attitudes, thinking, and interests.

It takes a carefully planned, organized, and focussed public-relations effort merged with program planning, with all activities designed to carry out the program, with methods of interpreting the program to the public. Holding public confidence is an around-the-clock job.

Interpret to Whom

To the people with whom you are already successfully working . . . those who know and profit from your services.

To the people whom you would like to bring into your immediate circle of cooperators . . . those who need your help most, but whom may be backward in asking for the services to which they are entitled.

To the people who have a financial stake in the county extension program, but who may not benefit from it in a direct, tangible way.

To the local-opinion leaders . . . the clergy, teachers, businessmen, newspaper editors, elected representatives of government, and the like. These key people should be given special consideration. They influence many others.

County Program Building is Extension's Public Relations Nerve Center

The county program is the nerve center of Extension public relations . . . national and State, as well as county. What the public thinks of your work is important not only to you, but to your colleagues in other counties, and to the entire Cooperative Extension Service.

Substance of the county program gives character, tone, authority, and appeal to your written or spoken words. Public relations must proceed naturally from events and activities that are bedrocked on genuinely solid substance. People won't buy wind.

Rural people are active partners with their Government in the conduct of Extension work and should be given every opportunity to share in developing the program which, in fact, belongs to them.

Major objectives, then, should be to convince people that you are sincerely and actively . . .

- (1) Giving attention to their major problems in a sound program which you are developing cooperatively with all local interests.
- (2) Keeping alert to constantly changing national and local situations and to people's attitudes toward them. Complete adaptation of a flexible program to local environment is a major source of Extension's public strength. Yesterday's program model should be in today's junk pile.
- (3) Reflecting Extension's responsibility for professional educational leadership in all matters involving local rural progress and the relation that this progress has to the welfare of neighboring urban communities.
- (4) Leading an activity that is in the public interest and advances the national as well as the rural welfare.

- (5) Encouraging a keener public appreciation of the relationship of a sound agriculture to a sound national economy.

Policy, Too, Is Involved in Public Relations

Although the public does not appraise policies as policies, people know when an agent does or does not do something in the public interest.

Policy is determined by Congress, the Department of Agriculture, the land-grant colleges. Back of them is the public. Policy is usually a compromise representing majority interests and commonly understood to reflect the general welfare. Policy is a bedraggled cat unless put to work where Extension meets people . . . in the counties.

Here are two examples of some broad policies that need local Extension application and public understanding:

Extension is a publicly supported organization charged with responsibility for providing certain services to all people on an equitable basis.

Extension is concerned not only with farm and home improvement, but with the total development of the individual in relation to his community and national environment.

Some Key Points People Should Understand

You can help people to realize better the vast proportions of the Cooperative Extension Service . . . its resources, its program content, its philosophy and objectives, its professional and volunteer staff. A few points to emphasize are these:

Extension is a four-way partnership . . . people with their county, State, and national governments.

Extension is an effective compromise between two extremes . . . the extreme of national group action in the public interest on one side and the extreme of individual initiative on the other.

Extension's program content includes everything that concerns rural welfare . . . everything from atomic energy and international relations to how to drive a nail straight or sew on a button properly.

Extension is an organization that harmonizes in its program the great resources of the land, of the people who till the land, of the research developed to promote better farm and home practices among the people, of the national agricultural programs designed to aid the people, and of

the tolls provided by industry. These elements are merged in an Extension educational program which leans heavily on human relations and individual freedom of expression and action.

We need local diversity in our approaches to people. But we need also to reflect in our local public contacts the nation-wide unity of Extension purpose . . . that your success locally depends upon vast resources of verified knowledge and upon the cooperative endeavor of the United States Department of Agriculture, the land-grant college, the county, and the people merged in the county Extension program.

Extension is financed jointly by the Federal, State and county governments. A little less than half of the total appropriation comes from Federal sources, a little more than half from State and county sources. Three-fourths of available funds are spent in the counties.

People should know that the county agricultural agent, home demonstration agent, 4-H Club work, and the Extension specialist at the college are vital links in a larger organization with significant public-service aims jointly administered by the United States Department of Agriculture and the State land-grant college. We belong to an amazing organization of vast proportions, which is difficult for us to realize because we are so intimately a part of it.

The How of Mass Public Relations

By this time you undoubtedly realize that public relations is more than publicity or techniques. It is philosophy, policies, the program, and attitudes, as well as the techniques of presentation. But techniques are important too.

The public-relations tool kit should include appearances, actions, attitudes, written words, spoken words, pictures . . . every possible method for catching the minds of people or of doing things in ways agreeable to people.

Catching minds requires you to gear the content of your information to the special interests, situations, and cultural or intellectual level of persons to be reached. It isn't so much the ideas that you have to "sell" that count. It's the ideas that people "buy."

Also important are the attitudes that you and your staff have toward people, toward each other, and toward your jobs. Personal attitudes creep unconsciously into one's public relations. How you tell or write your information is just as important as what you tell or write.

Public-relations tools are divided into two broad groups:

Direct face-to-face contacts with individuals and groups through farm and home visits, meetings, demonstrations, etc.

Indirect mass contacts through press, radio, circular letters, organizations, etc.

Personal and group contacts are more effective. But lack of personnel, increasing administrative responsibilities of agents, and need for wider public influence demands more and better use of mass methods to supplement personal and group contacts . . . also to reenforce them. Repetition in varied ways is the lifeblood of teaching.

Extension studies point to high effectiveness of mass methods in relation to cost. Surveys indicate that from 90 to 95 percent of the adult population listens to radio 15 minutes a day, or more; 85 to 90 percent reads one or more newspapers; 60 to 70 percent reads one or more magazines.

Sociologists tell us there is no such thing as uniform mass thinking over wide areas. But individuals do tend to reflect customs and habits of neighbors in same economic or social situation. Strategical approaches should therefore be slanted to group interests.

Although there may not be such a thing as herd thinking, much of what people think comes from what they have heard.

Ideas stream across among neighbors much faster than they will seep down from above. People respond more quickly to stimulating events and the neighborly sharing of ideas; less quickly to authoritative arguments, even if they are brilliantly logical and eloquently presented. Stories about the result achieved by individuals through extension work are therefore especially effective.

Mass information should be based upon verified knowledge. People lose confidence in agencies sponsoring propaganda or puffery. Unadulterated glamor may boomerang.

Mass information should be presented briefly, concretely, and simply. The human mind can absorb only a limited amount of information at one time.

Volunteer leaders, too, are public-relations assets when they are informed, well-trained, and enthusiastic. This is true from the vantage points both of getting your operating job done and of establishing good will. Volunteer leaders are undoubtedly also key members of their

churches, their lodges, their civic, service, and other clubs. Their influences with their groups can be a powerful instrument for widening public knowledge of Extension work. They should be kept fully acquainted with your activities and interested in them.

Extension has made high public-relations art of personal and group contacts. Mass methods in many counties are still laggards and need stepping up in quality and quantity.

Mass methods are not an added chore, but ways of educating and informing people. They are a vital part of a coordinated, balanced approach essential in accomplishing the complete Extension job.

Public Relations of Trivia

Not really trivia, because some simple things have extensive influence upon people. You can turn to good account many things you may ordinarily regard as commonplace.

Such things as courteous telephone manners, neatness of typewritten letters, casual conversation, friendly greetings to visitors, appearance of the office, etc.

For instance, in one year $8\frac{1}{2}$ million persons visit county extension offices, more than $7\frac{1}{2}$ million consult with agents on the telephone, and even more contact agents with letters. Such contacts provide opportunities for you to give power, effectiveness, and influence to Extension work.

To regard any of the smaller, more simple things as trivia is to regard the normal likings and prejudices of human nature as trifles.

Since we can't hope to reform other people's likes and dislikes, possibly the simplest remedy is to adjust ours to theirs.

New Public Relations for Old

- (1) Build up the influence and prestige of your public service through better planned public-relations methods. It isn't necessarily the agencies that may be doing the best operational job that receive the greatest public recognition. Mostly it's the agencies whose excellent accomplishments are better understood and appreciated by the public.
- (2) Make service the keynote of your public-relations platform. Accent the accomplishments of your cooperators over your personal achievements. Pat-yourself-on-the-back publicity can be disastrous.

- (3) When building recognition for your program, be sure to tie your services to the State and national Extension effort. People should know that you are backed up by the United States Department of Agriculture and the State land-grant colleges in an organization known as the Cooperative Extension Service.
- (4) Make the county program mirror as much public opinion as can be conveniently drawn into its formulation.
- (5) Find the greatest common denominator of local rural problems. Make this the hub of a balanced program, and dramatize it in terms of human interest that appeal to rural people . . . a judicious mixture of the helpful and the agreeable.
- (6) Spread Extension influence to every spot in the county . . . rural and urban. Use mass methods freely and intelligently, particularly for noncooperators and the city folks.
- (7) Report your work to elected Government representatives and to influential opinion leaders.
- (8) You are a source of unbiased information on proposed policies, so that rural people can be their own spokesmen. So, keep an intellectual balance between the pros and cons of controversial issues. It may be embarrassing to you, the State land-grant college, and the United States Department of Agriculture if you are publicly quoted in a way that gives the inference that you are taking one side of such an issue as a representative of the Cooperative Extension Service.
- (9) Keep your eye and mind on the person who gives you the most trouble. He may be a shy farmer or a newspaper editor. But he constitutes a challenge that provides a wholesome exercise in your public-relations schooling.
- (10) Keep your thinking and action on the high plane of national welfare. You are directly serving all rural people, but in the public interest.
- (11) The county extension program is a balanced, unified effort serving men, women, and youth. High morale, spirited enthusiasm, and harmonious relationships within the county staff are essential to good public relations. Low morale, competition, and conflicts in staff attitudes will diminish the quality of your relationships with the public.

- (12) Similarly, the public has a right to expect good cooperative relations among the local representatives of all government agricultural agencies. The functions of all such agencies are defined by Congress. Good relations with them should stem from a friendly desire to help them in a technical advisory capacity. Your educational responsibility also requires you to see that rural people understand the nature of all agricultural programs undertaken in the county, and that they learn about the opportunities thus provided.
- (13) Consider carefully the little things. The so-called little things sometimes loom big in the other man's mind.
- (14) Become eager students of motivating people as a springboard to greater service.

CONSULT YOUR STATE OFFICE

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"It's The Way You Serve People"

